Abstract 3A

Peer Assessment: A Conduit for Developing Graduate Attributes?

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The research question that shapes this study is to what extent does peer assessment facilitate the development of graduate attributes? The literature advises that peer assessment develops transferable skills e.g. critical thinking, self evaluation and reflective practice (Thuy and Dall'Allb, 2007; Thompson et al, 2005; Langan and Wheater, 2003; Stanier, 1997, Brown et al, 1994). Moreover it offers the potential for increased self confidence (Brew et al, 2009, Prins et al, 2005) and enhances students' sense of responsibility as autonomous learners (Brown et al, 1994): issues that lie at the heart of the graduate attribute agenda.

This study draws on this literature in analysing the experiences of engineering students' undertaking an entrepreneurship course. The quantitative phase involved a two stage questionnaire that was issued before and after peer assessment. The qualitative phase consisted of three focus groups with these students, following completion of peer assessment activities.

Initial findings revealed that students welcomed peer assessment and that, subsequently, it had positively impacted upon some key skills. Additionally, significant themes emerged that informs implementation. To begin with, assessing the relationship among peers was underlined: firstly, confidence in their peers' abilities to review was vital and underpins the legitimacy of the exercise. Secondly, there was fear of a one way flow of knowledge between peers and concern that others could appropriate their work. Thirdly, building this in as a compulsory assessment component may be required to ensure that *all* students to take the exercise seriously. Finally, it was evident that students viewed their peers' opinions as second rate to those of the lecturer when receiving feedback. This issue perhaps relates to the more traditional expectations regarding the roles of staff and students as well as the balance of power between lecturer and student.

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